

IV. B. 7. Important Rangelands and National Grasslands

- a) Background. The Farmland Protection Policy Act (Public Law 98-98) became effective on December 22, 1981,

“.....to minimize the extent to which Federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, and to assure that Federal programs are administered in a manner that, to the extent practicable, will be compatible with State, unit of local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland.”

The Farmland Protection Policy Act, despite its title, was set up to protect significant rangelands as well as important farmland resources.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture passed its implementing regulation, Departmental Regulation DR 9500-3, “Land Use Policy”, shortly thereafter and assigned primary technical responsibility to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS in turn established the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system for use in the technical evaluation of proposed Federal actions which could result in the conversion of important rangelands of the United States. LESA was also intended to serve as a model for adoption by State and local governments in creating their own rangeland protection systems. Rural Development environmental reviewers are expected to use the LESA system in analyzing rangeland conversion impacts of proposed Rural Development actions.

The intent of the LESA system analytical process is to not adversely impact the most important rangelands in private ownership unless there is no practical alternative and not to serve as a draconian measure over State and local land use planning goals.



- b) Governing Regulations.



- (1) Federal.
 - (a) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy.
 - (b) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Departmental Regulation 9500~5, Policy on Range.
 - (c) Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended, (PL 93-378).
 - (d) Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (PL 95-192).
 - (e) Renewable Resources Extension Act of 1978 (PL 95-306).
 - (f) Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PL 95-514).
 - (g) Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (PL 94-579).
 - (h) Executive Order 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality.
 - (i) Title 7, Part 1b and 1c, Code of Federal Regulations, U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Environmental Policy Act.
 - (j) National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. 4321.
- c) Policy. Rangelands provide the principal source of forage for the cattle and sheep operations on thousands of American farms and ranches. Ranges also provide water, recreation, wildlife and fish habitat and cover, minerals, and archaeological, historical, and cultural amenities. As the human population increases, the need for forage and the other range resources will also increase. Rural Development should advocate the protection and enhancement of range ecosystems and contribute to the social and economic well being of people and communities that depend on range for their livelihoods.

Rural Development should not authorize, fund, or carry out a proposed action (1) involving the conversion of prime rangeland or (2) adversely affecting the unique values and benefits of prime rangeland or National Grasslands unless there is clearly no practical alternative to the action. Whenever a action is determined to have the potential for impacting prime rangeland, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conversation Service, or Forest Service and local Soil Conservation District should be consulted, as appropriate, as early as possible in the environmental impact analysis process to evaluate the degree of impact, possible consequences, and protective requirements concerning the action.

- d) Classification.



- (1) National Grasslands.
 - (2) Prime rangeland.
- e) Agency Jurisdiction.
- (1) National Grasslands. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (FS), is the Federal agency charged with managing National Grasslands. Confer with the appropriate U.S. Forest Service field office for impacts to National Grasslands. The contact persons for the U.S. Forest Service are as follows for the National Grassland of particular concern:
 - (a) Pawnee Natural Grassland:
660 "O" Street
Greeley, Colorado 80631

(970) 353-5004

<http://www.fs.fed.us/arnf/png/>
 - (b) Commanche Natural Grassland:
1420 East 3rd Street
La Junta, Colorado 81050

(719) 384-2181

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/coma/index.htm>
 - (c) Cimarron National Grassland
P.O. Box 300
Elkhart, Kansas 67950

(316) 697-4621

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/cim/index.htm>
 - (2) Prime rangeland. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is the key Federal agency charged with classifying and maintaining data regarding prime rangeland. Confer with the appropriate NRCS local office with regard to impacts to prime rangeland.

The Colorado State Office contact for the NRCS is:

Natural Resource Conservation Service
Colorado State Office



State Resource Conservationist
655 Parfet Street
Room E200c
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

Contact: Timothy Wheeler, (303) 236-2886

<http://www.co.nrcs.gov/>

The Colorado Department of Agriculture also maintains data regarding important rangelands in private ownership affording special concern by the State of Colorado. The particulars of the Farmland Protection Policy Act do not apply to these lands unless they are classified by the NRCS as "prime rangeland" and a Rural Development action could potentially convert them from agricultural use.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture contact is:

Colorado Department of Agriculture
Resource Analysis Section
700 Kipling Street
Suite 4000
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

Contact: David Carlson, (303) 239-4112

<http://www.ag.state.co.us/>

f) Location of Resource.

- (1) National Grasslands There are presently two National Grasslands (the Commanche N.G. and the Pawnee N.G.) located within the State of Colorado and one (Cimarron N.G.) located along the southeast border of Colorado and Kansas, within the State of Kansas. Parcels of land within each National Grassland are federally or privately owned. Consult with the appropriate U.S. Forest Service field office with regard to potential impacts to these land resources.
- (2) Prime Range land. Consult the appropriate NRCS field office with regard to the location and quality of this resource.



g) Other References.

- 1) USDA/RUS Environmental Program Library
(Full text of the Farmland Protection Policy Act)
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/toc.htm#Statutes>
- 2) USDA/RUS Environmental Program Library
(Full text of Departmental Regulation 9500-3, "*Land Use Policy*")
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/toc.htm#Regulations>
- 3) U.S. Forest Service
(National Grasslands locator web-site)
<http://www.fs.fed.us/grasslands>